

LINCOLN AND ROOSEVELT

A CHARACTER SKETCH BY FITZ MAC

THE likeness between the characters of Lincoln and Roosevelt is not noted on the casual glance at least, but on the closer inspection, it is striking. The one is our historic ideal of a majestic mental magnitude and mental repose; the other, our living embodiment of an earnest and strenuous but irritating mental activity.

Yet in the elementary qualities, character, in the impulsive motive of their lives and in the moral aspects of their intimate personal natures there appears to be a similarity as close as the resemblance in their political fortunes.

The difference appears to be a difference of methods rather than of purposes. Yet where public consent is necessary to make the purpose effective, method is hardly to be reckoned as secondary to purpose.

In business matters—and politics is only public business—a bad method may bring the soundest principles to naught, while a felicitous method may render even defective principles very useful.

President Roosevelt is giving himself—all that is in him, heart and soul and body—without reserve, to his country, just as our esteemed cousin William of Germany is.

And that is noble in both of them—all agree that it is noble and no one is kicking at the beautiful devotion. But there is always danger in such cases of giving more than the country can stomach with comfort.

In the matter of bedrock wisdom it would, of course, affront American idealism to compare any one but Washington with Lincoln. Yet for a statesman under the numerous disadvantages of being alive, President Roosevelt has gained a pretty fair reputation for wisdom.

There is a difference, of course, but still it is wisdom of a sort—and really, in general, of the same home, sane sort as Lincoln's, easily comprehended by "the plain common people," and resembling it more than a little.

But President Roosevelt resembles in character, capacity and ambition, no other living mortal so closely as he resembles that able, self-conscious, obtrusively patriotic and irritating young man who happens at the moment to be the hereditary President of the German Empire, as Roosevelt himself chances to be the elective Emperor, imperator, leader of the Yankee Republic.

Comparison, however, is not limited to resemblances, but extends to contrasts, and the imagination sometimes receives a more suggestive and luminous definition of character by showing what a man is not like, than by presenting a resemblance. As, for instance, if it were asked why is Theodore Roosevelt unlike a claim?

The obvious answer, because a claim has no backbone, emphasizes and fixes attention on one of the strongest mental characteristics of our esteemed President.

For an ambitious man, exposed to the vicissitudes of American politics, and inclined from his youth to abandon himself to the enervating vice of literature, it cannot be denied that President Roosevelt has exhibited an amazing opulence of backbone—with all the honorable self-assertion that the word implies.

Yet it is not, thank God, simply the resistant vertical development called stubbornness, but the initiating and energizing element properly called courage.

It is a vitalizing backbone—sometimes fairly electrifying. It is an admirable quality of character, and the country admires it. What a thrill of admiration it sent through the generous and sympathizing marrow of the country when, last Summer, in one of his Pacific Coast speeches, amid the question of his renomination and of his refusal to truckle to the big politicians to secure it, he said: "I would rather be all-president for three years than half-president for seven years."

That is the quality of backbone this Yankee Nation likes in a President. It strikes us to the marrow, and we like to be stirred. It arouses expectation, and we like to be aroused and to expect. We like, in a President, the courage that never needs a rest or ever dodges one.

No matter how badly things go with us Yankees, we can never get over the habit of believing that Providence always carries a high card up her sleeve (the man for the occasion) to carry us through the States when the game begins to run against us, and just now, when the moral character of the political play seemed to be taking on a low, trucking tone, we are thinking that Roosevelt is the high card.

The country likes him—there can't be a doubt about it, and he, thoroughly, that is beyond question.

No President of the United States—not even Lincoln—has ever, during his incumbency, been so completely trusted and so completely trusted as Roosevelt, at least, by the common run of plain, intelligent Americans.

But the politicians? The big "statesmen"—well, that is another story. He has "got the stuff in him," that "the plain, common people" like.

But the momentous truth is that it's for his lively and thorough sympathy with the good in ourselves that we love him, and for his aggressive courage in defense of our plain principles of right in politics that we trust him, not for any deep and abiding confidence in his superior wisdom—not yet.

Down at the bottom we do not yet really completely believe in his superior wisdom. It has not yet been proved, it is still on trial. The evidence so far, is all of the right kind, but the evidence is not yet all in, and, if the ghastly truth must be confessed in this hour of his flustering popularity, the country is expecting him presently to blunder to blunder badly—to blunder away his chances of a renomination and a re-election.

After much the politicians and the "big statesmen" may have to do with that sense of unpleasant expectancy in the public mind—to what extent the wish in their hearts may cast the shadow of fear, of admiring doubt, of doubting confidence, into the public heart is a question that no one can answer positively. It probably has a considerable influence.

The politicians, of course, do not dislike the manly virtues any more than do the other people. They do not hate Roosevelt, and desire to down him because he is patriotic, but only because he is not patriotic in their way. Yet they are not blind to the fact that the country likes Roosevelt's way and trusts it because it is straight-out and hearty and frank, and doesn't like their way because it is involved and savoring of government by conspiracy. They owe their prominence, their pull, their graft (which ever) to their involvement in the game, and naturally they believe in them. But they are unable to quite understand that Roosevelt likewise owes his distinguished pre-eminence, and his influence, to the methods which are immeasurably simpler, and which the common people can and do understand and approve.

There may be—there often is—a shrewd cunning and deep insight in frankness and simple, straight methods, which minds essentially cunning in the evil sense cannot comprehend. Lincoln possessed such a subtle cunning as that, and Roosevelt, too, in a way. But every man who truckles is not a heart a rogue. He may be, he often is, nothing worse than a coward. If they could believe in success by Roosevelt's methods, tens of thousands of politicians would much prefer to follow them. But they haven't courage, they haven't faith, they haven't insight, they haven't originality.

They are poor, truckling imitators. The only way to make Roosevelt's method popular, with the common run of well-meaning imbeciles who graft themselves into politics is to make that

OSTER BAY, LONG ISLAND, N. Y.
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SAGAMORE HILL

My dear Bryan,
I really owe you a debt for getting me the chance to read the excellent Fitz Mac sketch. Will you convey to Mr. McArthur my thanks? There is much about them that is to me particularly attractive, especially in the Hallitt article; for I have myself been some long driving into the ear of our good people long that devotion to what Fitz Mac sums up as "Bureaucratic" first and foremost, but in literature and habits of thought as well, is very ignoble as a life work, and that they are themselves largely to blame for our misgovernment. Such articles as Fitz Mac's are thoroughly healthy in tone.

are really refreshing to read. There are one or two points on which, if I hope we meet I desire to question him. I was fairly astounded at his statement that \$0,000 dollars would make the difference in Colorado's vote for instance. I make \$400,000 counts very much; but not when the sentiment of the people is thoroughly aroused. But I suppose in Indiana and Connecticut the result is the same. No is the mismanagement of the ballots by the officials regarded as a venial offense here. But there is undoubtedly much biting of voters. Please convey to Fitz Mac my very warmest thanks.
Yours faithfully
Theodore Roosevelt

Editorial Note.—This letter was written by Mr. Roosevelt to Colonel Charles Page Bryan, now United States Minister to Portugal, then a resident of Colorado, who had sent to his friend, Mr. Roosevelt, a copy of Fitz Mac's book, "Political Portraits," at that time just published.

Fitz Mac says of it: "My friend Bryan turned the letter over to me, and I put it in my scrapbook, saying to myself: 'The man may be President some day. I met him 12 years later, and he referred to matters in the book, which I could not myself remember, so I fancy it really impressed him.'"

It is astonishing to reflect how many things Lincoln did not know, and how many things he didn't try to do—and yet his wisdom had that quality of luminous comprehensiveness which makes it a beacon and a guide in wide realms of thought never traversed by his own mind.

It was elemental, and, therefore, from eternity unto eternity. That is the character of wisdom always, and therein it differs from knowledge.

Why, even Solomon, who is reckoned the wisest of mankind, didn't know as many things as President Roosevelt. Didn't even know a good many things that President Roosevelt's little son can tell you all about—didn't know that the earth is spherical—looked at the moon all his life from the flat rooftop of his palace in Jerusalem, and never knew, never even suspected that it has no atmosphere.

But that sort of thing is knowledge—wisdom is a horse of another color. No President has ever before acquired so extended an influence over the contemporary life of his country, in matters not strictly political, as Roosevelt. And it is a thoroughly wholesome influence, too, that goes into the homes and into the hearts of the people and makes directly and powerfully for better manhood and womanhood, for higher personal and social morals and for cleaner politics.

But—let us tell the truth. It is wholesome, it is useful, it is ennobling, but—The whole haggard, deplorable truth of the case is that it is damnably irritating. President Roosevelt (God bless him for it) has led the young manhood of this Nation to higher ideals of public morality, to simpler, honest, more robust and wholesome ideals of personal life. We all feel it and acknowledge it. We all thank God for it, but—

Well, it rebukes our Yankee self-complacency, and because it rebukes, it irritates. It puts a wholesome but unaccustomed strain upon us from which we would escape if we could find a decent excuse. Our irritated spirits would dodge from under it and cry out against it, if—having regard for our children—we dared.

But we dare not yet—our children's good constrains us to endure the irritation—our Nation's future good, for we are patriotic, too, and we are not such fools but we recognize the high spirit of patriotism in President Roosevelt's motive, and are penetrated by its genuine earnestness.

But the man is (for a President) an exasperating pedagogue that we must seek to escape from him, with whom the higher wisdom abides) a way for the country to escape from him. We must make that hateful and irritating word "strenuous" (retained, which he borrowed from a gifted bore, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, who harped it to a fare-you-well in "Robert Elsmere," and which, with all its derivative, is a barroom patronized by the (mostly) gushing "lady" writers of both sexes) have worn to a mutilated and nauseating frazzle—we must make that irritating word cool Mr. Roosevelt's reputation, his reach.

Pedagogism is a new thing in American Presidents—not new, however, in Germany, where they have a Roosevelt for an Emperor, a most "strenuous" and irritating (and noble-minded) person. President McKinley possessed a great, calm, mesmeric genius for putting the

mountain he telephoned to New York to one of the famous elephant experts of the country. The expert demanded a full list of symptoms, and then answered hurriedly that he was too busy.

The "old man" hustled to New York in person. There, near the Madison-Square Garden, in a barroom patronized by a queer lot of customers, they are lion trainers, elephant men, and all sorts of experts in the wild animal line.

He required some hours and more drinks to induce any of them to wander out to the wildest New Jersey, to subdue a mad elephant, but at last three of them went.

Attacking the Monster. They got there none too soon. All hands at the farm were preparing to hunt cover. The tree was almost out of the ground. Without wasting time in parley, the three elephants men armed themselves.

One took an elephant goad, a mighty piece of timber with a point and hook. Another selected a huge sapling. The third grabbed a two-tined pitchfork.

The roots of the tree were showing above ground on one side. Bang! went the sapling straight down on the big, bulging forehead. It struck with a crack that sounded as if a thousand skulls had been splintered. The elephant shook his head and charged.

Dig! went the goad deep into his flank, driven with a force that made the wielder of the weapon grunt. The elephant turned quick as a flash and rushed the length of his chain.

But he recoiled with a scream. The pitchfork had begun. Jab! jab! jab straight into the sensitive trunk went the two tines, each time with a lunge. He thrust at them viciously with his trunk. Twice they buried themselves half way.

Squealing, shrieking, screaming, trumpeting, the elephant stood still for a moment—but only for a moment. Then he coiled his trunk between his tusks to protect it and made another dash. He reared up the man with the goad. Only a blinding blow from the sapling saved his foe.

Dusk came and black night came, and still the men fought the unconquered beast. They knew that now it meant a probable loss of human life and a certain destruction of valuable property if they gave the brute a chance to tear at the weakened tree for even a moment.

So, steadily, continually, they hampered, stabbed and clubbed the monster.

ment, a result to be deplored, for there is moral need of a schoolteacher President in the United States just now to pull us out of our bad habits and keep us humbling along the road of moral progress.

I think it would probably help Cousin William of Germany (and perhaps President Roosevelt) to reflect deeply that three utterances out of every four which even the wisest man makes are either foolish or trite or needless, and that three things out of every four which even the statesman of soundest judgment puts his hands to had better be left undone, or left to work themselves out, unforced, by the natural process of general evolution.

I could command the Imperial car of Germany, I could say: "Cousin Wilhelm, keep your coat on and don't get in the sands of time. You are all right, Cousin Wilhelm, you've got the stuff in you. You are a useful man and a capable, conscientious, public servant. You are the bully boy with the glass eye, and we Yankees all admire you. We think you are a noble-minded and clever man—wonderfully clever. But, Cousin Wilhelm, there is just a suggestion—pardon the candid observation, pray—just a slight suggestion of too-muchness about you, and you know—of course you know yourself, Cousin Wilhelm—the meaning of that classic and luminous adage, 'Too much is plenty'; therefore let me caution you, pray, to remember that the humanity that is bored with loquacious morality, and rebuffed being hurried along the straight, narrow path at too fast a jog. Our sainted Lincoln would have told you this, Cousin Wilhelm; he was a good man and a wise one, but he never got in a sweat about his footprints. He just 'done his level best' for his country and left results to God and history."

Yet it is to be remarked that Roosevelt is not a carping calamity-howler. The reformatory split in him is cheerful, hopeful, almost gleeful, and it is to be remarked finally that his strenuousness does not strain the temper of "the plain, common people"—only the politicians. To the plain, common people it is as fresh and pleasant and stimulating as a sprig of sweetbrier.

But the big politicians are aching to clinch with him, and will throw him if they dare. They are stronger than he and they know it, but—

They know also that they are not so strong as he and the "plain, common people" together. They have admitted to throw him in the nominating convention lest the people resent it at the polls.

It isn't absolutely certain to my mind that Roosevelt will be elected, but it is certain as death that no other Republican can be elected, for 1904 is calamity year for the United States—one of our periodical crazy years—and the Democratic party is our regular calamity party, the uncurried heir of all our National imbecilities.

Roosevelt is a noble man, God bless him (so we all pray), and if he doesn't become like Cousin William of Germany, a pedagogical bore with his strenuousness, he will take rank not far below Lincoln—not, perhaps, for his calm wisdom and certainly not for his long-enduring, Christ-like patience, but for his true and genuine sympathy with the honest intelligence and decent self-respect of "the plain, common people."

The danger of defeating his generous and frank ambition, either in the nominating convention or at the polls, is not that he is the only man in the country at once clean, courageous, high-minded and patriotic—for we must have millions of that sort or the country would quickly go to the dogs—but that the youth of the country whose attitudes and admiration have been fixed upon him to an intense degree as a model for their own lives would receive, through his defeat, the erroneous impression that those elements of character which they have admired in him and essayed to imitate, are not the elements of character which qualify an American citizen for success in a life of action.

Both are spurred by the same generous ambition to leave a few footprints of their own on the sands of time, and both appear to be humbling themselves "strenuously" to make all the tracks they can before the tide of time overwhelms them and bears them away into the ocean of eternity.

Whatever comes or goes, Mr. Roosevelt is sure to take rank among the great Presidents of the United States, but whether among the greatest remains to be seen.

His influence is peculiar, but it is unquestionably very extended, and is perhaps going to prove very profound. That it is altogether as plucky and makes for manliness and courage and truth and frugality and industry in the citizen as well as for a high sense of moral responsibility in the Nation is unquestioned.

As far as concerns his personal ambition the danger is that the country may weary, not of his principles, for the heart of the country is sound and his principles are its principles, but of his "strenuousness," irritating, keep-awake-and-stir-the-kettle personality. And that would be, in my judgment, a great loss.

Our Presidency is a great place. It is the most exalted position of power, among exalted positions, the most independent of traditions that embarrass and thwart the personal usefulness of the incumbent. In such an exalted position the great citizen, and it is great citizen that this self-complacent country of ours most needs at present, not great statesmen. Then we have under every bush—or at least I will not necessarily bruise the ambitious vanity of my countrymen by hinting a doubt of it.

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